

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4402

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 3318

STADIS////////////////////////////////////

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OREP (OBEY, DAVE D.WISC)

SUBJ: CODEL OBEY VISIT TO SYRIA

1. SUMMARY: SHORT CODEL OBEY VISIT PROVIDED GOOD OPPORTUNITY FOR EXCHANGES ON ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, AS CODEL HAD ORIGINALLY REQUESTED, BUT CODEL'S REAL MAIN INTEREST WAS POLITICS. CODEL DISAPPOINTED IN NOT SEEING ASAD, ALTHOUGH INFORMED WELL IN ADVANCE THIS NOT POSSIBLE GIVEN CONCURRENT VISIT YEMENI PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI. VISIT DEMONSTRATED TO US CLEAR NEED PRIOR TO ARRIVAL OF CODEL OF DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ITS REAL INTERESTS AND DESIRES. END SUMMARY.

2. CODEL OBEY'S 21-HOUR VISIT TO DAMASCUW WAS LOGISTICS SUCCESS, BUT NOT OF SUBSTANTIVE NATURE REPRESENTATIVES OBEY, KOCH, AND EARLY WERE ANTICIPATING. STATE 173471 EMPHASIZED "PRIMARY INTEREST IN MATTERS RELATED TO FOREIGN ASSISTANCE," BUT IN FACT CODEL'S INTERESTS WERE 98 PER CENT POLITICAL. THIS WAS REASON THEY HAD SANDWICHED SYRIAN STOP INTO VERY TIGHT SCHEDULE. THEY WANTED TO HEAR SYRIAN VIEWS ON PEACE IN MIDDLE EAST. CODEL HAD APPROVED (STATE 185709) CONFIDENTIAL

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OUR PROPOSED PROGRAM (DAMASCUS 2887) WITH PRIMARY EMPHASIS

ON AID MATTERS, AND ACCEPTED OF FACT THAT APPOINTMENT WITH ASAD NOT POSSIBLE (DAMASCUS 3089, STATE 191852), SINCE CODEL UNABLE ADJUST SCHEDULE TO BE HERE WHEN ASAD WOULD HAVE BEEN AVAILABLE. CODEL NEVERTHELESS VOICED STRONG DISAPPOINTMENT IN NOT BEING ABLE TO SEE ASAD. STRESSED THEY HAD SEEN SOARES IN LISBON, SADAT IN ALEXANDRIA AND FULLY EXPECTED TO SEE HUSSEIN AND RABIN AFTER DAMASCUS, AND THUS MUST SEE ASAD. THE EMBASSY CHECKED BACK DIRECTLY WITH PRESIDENCY WHICH REGRETTED THAT MEETING IMPOSSIBLE GIVEN ASAD'S COMMITMENT TO VISITING YEMENI PRESIDENT AL-HAMDI.

3. CODEL'S VIGOROUSLY VOICED DISAPPOINTMENT TOOK UP MOST OF COUNTRY TEAM BRIEFING AND THEN 11 SYRIANS ARRIVED FOR STAG, BUSINESS DINNER, EXPECTING TO DISCUSS ECONOMIC MATTERS. POLITICS AND MIDDLE EAST PEACE WERE THE MAIN COURSE, HOWEVER, AND ALTHOUGH LIVELY EXCHANGE OF VIEWS FOLLOWED, CODEL, IN ITS OPINION, DID NOT RECEIVE CLEAR, HIGH-LEVEL EXPOSITION OF OFFICIAL SYRIAN POLITICAL POSITION THEY WANTED.

4. MIDWAY INTO EVENING, REP KOCH EXPRESSED TO AMBASSADOR HIS DESIRE TO VISIT DAMASCUS JEWISH QUARTER AND ALSO PRAY IN SYNAGOGUES FOLLOWING MORNING. AFTER SOME QUICK TELEPHONING, A 0500-0700 HOURS VISIT WAS ARRANGED WITH SARG PROTOCOL OFFICER ACCOMPANYING. REP EARLY JOINED REP KOCH ON THIS TOUR.

5. MEANWHILE, CODEL WAS MAKING CALLS TO SET UP PLO APPOINTMENT WHICH CLOVIS MAQSUD WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE ARRANGED FROM BEIRUT.

6. OUR AUGUST 26 SCHEDULE PROCEEDED APACE, WITH 0830 APPOINTMENT WITH MINISTER OF ECONOMY AND FOREIGN TRADE DR. IMADI. AGAIN, 98 PER CENT OF DISCUSSION WAS POLITICS, WITH KOCH HITTING HARD ON JEWISH EMIGRATION ISSUE. IMADI (AN NYU GRADUATE, AS WAS KOCH) WAS GRACIOUS AND FORTHRIGHT IN PRESENTING OFFICIAL, HIGH-LEVEL SYRIAN POLITICAL POSITION. AS GOOD AS HE WAS, HOWEVER, HE WAS PUSHED BEYOND AREA OF EXPERTISE TO POINT OF MAKING TWO MISSTATEMENTS CONCERNING OFFICIAL SARG ACTIONS VIS-A-VIS JEWS IN SYRIA (MINISTER ASSERTED ID CARDS OF SYRIAN JEWS DID NOT MENTION RELIGION -- CONFIDENTIAL

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THEY DO -- AND JEWS HAVE JUST AS MUCH RIGHT, AND ARE NOT TREATED ANY DIFFERENTLY FROM ANY OTHER SYRIAN AS REGARDS RIGHT, TO LEAVE COUNTRY). REP EARLY DID ASK A FEW QUESTIONS ON AID AND VIGOROUS 75-MINUTE EXCHANGE WITH IMADI WAS FOLLOWED BY SCHEDULED VISIT TO FIGEH WATER COMPANY TO REVIEW USAID PROJECT FOR DAMASCUS WATER SUPPLY. THIS MEETING WAS SHORT AND NONPOLITICAL.

7. MEANWHILE, ANOTHER SERIES OF CODEL CALLS TO REPUTED PLO CONTACTS, USING NAMES AND NUMBERS SUPPLIED BY MAQSOD FROM BEIRUT. THEIR CALLS WERE NOT RETURNED AND NO MEETING EVENTUATED.

8. CODEL THEN OPTED FOR SIGHTSEEING AND SHOPPING, RATHER THAN TAKING UP OUR OFFER TO ARRANGE MEETINGS WITH ACTING PRIME MINISTER HAYDAR AND MININFO. VISIT CONCLUDED WITH AMBASSADOR HOSTING LUNCH AND REVIEWING IN DETAIL POLITICAL/MILITARY SITUATION, ECONOMIC AID AND STATUS OF JEWS IN SYRIA.

9. COMMENT: IN SUM, IT WAS LIVELY, AND NO DOUBT PROVIDED GOOD PRACTICE FOR MINISTER OF ECONOMY, DEPUTY MINISTERS OF PLANNING AND PUBLIC WORKS, AND OTHER SYRIAN ECONOMIC, WATER, LIVESTOCK, ETC., EXPERTS TO PRESENT HIGH-LEVEL, OFFICIAL SARG POLITICAL/MILITARY VIEWS. IN FAIRNESS TO FUTURE CODELS, TO SYRIANS AND EMBASSY, HOWEVER, WE REQUEST MORE DETAILED GUIDANCE IN FUTURE ON REAL RPT REAL DESIRES OF CODEL. IN THIS CASE WE RESPONDED TO EXPRESSED DESIRES, HAD OUR PROGRAM APPROVED (TWICE) AND THEN FOUND CODEL EXPRESSING TOTALLY DIFFERENT INTERESTS. WOULD BE PARTICULARLY HELPFUL TO HAVE ADVANCE NOTICE ON INTEREST OF ANY CODEL IN VISITING JEWISH QUARTER IN DAMASCUS.
MURPHY

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